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AGRICULTURE UNDER RURAL LEADERSHIP

A radio talk by W. A. Lloyd, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered in the National 4-H Club Radio Program, December 1, 1934, and broadcast by a network of 58 associate NBC radio stations.

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"A long time ago when I was a little boy" was the usual introduction of an interesting story by a fine old gentleman friend of mine. Well, a long time ago when I was a little boy we used to play a game called "Follow the Leader." It was a good game, too; and, like many of the old-fashioned games, it had a teaching value as well as being simply an amusement. Up hill and down hill, over logs, through the brush, across streams and ponds, wherever the leader went the others must follow. The timid boys and the "fraid cats" dropped out. The game was a test of loyalty and endurance on the part of the followers and of safety-- sometimes of adventure and daring --on the part of the leader.

It is a game grown-ups must learn to play, also, and many of the same elements enter into it. Life is like that. Sometimes in the old game the leader himself got into trouble if he tried to take his followers into paths with which he himself was not familiar. It is a good thing, too, if our rural leadership should be recruited from those who are familiar with life on the farm-- familiar with the country home. Just now, when new paths seem to be opening before rural America, it is very desirable that the new leadership be familiar with the old landmarks. There will be little enough to guide us at best. We shall be much less likely to fall into new sloughs of despond or attempt to scale impossible heights if our leadership knows not only the spirit but the attitudes of country people.

One of the outstanding virtues of our 4-H boys' and girls' clubs is the training they give to young people in rural leadership. We do not have records of what all of the five to six million boys and girls who have been in 4-H club work since its beginning are now doing. We do know that they are making a substantial contribution to rural leadership. In one State (Oklahoma) we are informed that 10 per cent of the total Extension staff consists of former 4-H club members. In another State (West Virginia) we are told that approximately one-half of the county extension agents (men and women) are former club members. It is probable that a conservative estimate would be at least 10 per cent of the present Extension staff in all States has been recruited from those who have had training in our 4-H clubs. That would mean 600 to 700 of the Extension workers.

Montana, in its last annual report, states that 17 per cent of the adult leaders of 4-H clubs are former club members. In a list of only a few of those who have been prize winners in various club activities, we find these young men and women now occupying such positions as State club leader, assistant State club leader, county agricultural agents, home demonstration agents, county club agents, teachers of home economics, vocational teachers, extension specialists in rural organization, extension editors, specialists in marketing, dairying, poultry, and rural ministers, to mention a few only. This is significant of the professional advancement

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that has been won by the former club members, but, even more important than this is the rapidly increasing number of 4-H club members who are serving as leaders of adult farm groups not only in extension projects, but also as grange masters and lecturers, presidents and secretaries of farm bureaus, the farmers' union, farmers' clubs, local cooperative marketing associations, and the other farmers' organizations. We know also of many instances where former club members are serving as members of county allotment committees in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's work. This is a new type of rural leadership of very great significance. It would be unfair, of course, to say that all these former club members are occupying the places they do wholly because of their 4-H club training, but undoubtedly it has been a contributing factor of great importance.

In view of the significant changes now in process of development in rural life in America, too much emphasis cannot be placed on the quality of the new leadership. Both the direction it will take and its final success depend on this. The old game of "Follow the Leader" will continue to be played over and over again in real life. To the youth of today we much entrust the well-being and the progress of the rural America of tomorrow. Let us hope that in a large measure this new leadership may be recruited from the grass-roots. Our boys' and girls' clubs should be important factors in providing this new leadership.